

June 10, 1993

Gabriel Preil, 82, American Poet And Translator Skilled in Hebrew

By WILLIAM GRIMES

Gabriel Preil, an American poet who wrote in Hebrew, which he called "the language of my heart," died on Saturday in his hotel room in Jerusalem. He was in Israel for the publication of "A Collector of Autumns," his most recent poetry collection. He was 82 and lived in the Bronx.

Although little known in the United States, Mr. Preil was an important influence on younger Israeli poets, both for his poetry, which was introspective, lyrical and restrained, and for his translations into Hebrew of American poets like Robert Frost, Robinson Jeffers and Wallace Stevens.

Mr. Preil was born in Dorpat, Estonia, and in 1922 moved to New York, where he attended the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary and the Teacher's Institute, now part of Yeshiva University. He published his first poetry, in Yiddish, in 1936. During World War II he worked in the Office of War Information writing scripts for broadcast to the Jewish population of Palestine.

His poetry collections included "Landscape of Sun and Frost" (1944), "Map of Evening" (1961), "Fire and Silence" (1968) and "Of Time and Place" (1973). Often he took as his subject matter the landscape of New England, or autumn in New York. A selection of his poems appeared in English translation in "Autumn Music" (1979), and in 1986 the Jewish Publication Society of America published a bilingual collection of his poetry under the title "Sunset Possibilities and Other Poems." "A Split Soul"

In 1983, The Jerusalem Post asked Mr. Preil how an important Hebrew poet could justify not living in Israel. He said: "I am an anomalous creature, a split soul. I am perhaps the most American of the past and present Hebrew poets. I am the only Hebrew poet, for example, who wrote a series of poems on the State of Maine."

English translations of his poetry also appear in anthologies, including "The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse" (1980) and "Voices Within the Ark: The Modern Jewish Poets" (1980).

His numerous honors included the Louis La Med award for Hebrew literature (1942) and the Kovner Memorial Hebrew Poetry Prize from the Jewish Book Council of America (1955 and 1961). In 1983 he was honored by the American Jewish Committee for outstanding contributions to Jewish literature, and last year he received the Bialik Prize, one of Israel's most prestigious awards. He received an honorary doctorate from Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in 1972.

There are no survivors.

Correction: June 11, 1993, Friday

An obituary yesterday about Gabriel Preil, an American poet and translator skilled in Hebrew who died on Saturday at 82, omitted a survivor. He is Mr. Preil's brother, Joseph Kushner of Brooklyn.